

“Division Headquarters – 1919 – 1983”

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Retiring Chairman's Address given on 28 March 1983

Introduction

In August 1919 the Western Australian Institution of Engineers accepted the Constitution of the proposed Institution of Engineers Australia and became one of the foundation member societies of the new National Institution. The Western Australian Institution ceased to exist and the Perth Division of the national Institution with its total WA membership of 79 began to meet. Since that date the Institution has occupied many premises in Perth prior to being permanently established at the present location. This paper summarises and documents some of the details of our accommodation from 1919 through to 1983.

The Early Meetings Of The Perth Division

The first General Meeting of the Perth Division was held in the Builders' Exchange Room in St George's Terrace, Perth, on January 14th 1920. The Builders' Exchange was the forerunner of the present Master Builders' Association.

The first General Meeting was followed a few days later by the first Division Committee Meeting of the Perth Division. This Committee Meeting was held in the James Street offices of the Water Supply Department, on January 22nd, 1920.

The First Headquarters

The Perth Division's first headquarters were in Queens Buildings. The General Meetings of the Institution were held there from March through to August in 1920 and the first Annual General Meeting of the Perth Division was held in these premises on 11th April 1921. Thirty members attended the first Annual General Meeting. This was typical of the attendances at the General Meetings in the first year, and compared favourably with the total Division membership of ninety in 1920.

Queens Buildings is on the corner of William and Murray Streets, Perth, and is part of a group of buildings between Hay Street and Murray Streets which are owned by the Uniting (then Methodist) Church. Whilst the Queens Buildings are substantially the same as they were in 1920, other major buildings in the group such as the Metro Theatre have been built and later demolished to make way for more recent developments.

The General Meetings in September and October 1920 and June, July, August and October 1921 were held in the Physics Lecture Room of the University of WA, which was at that stage located in Irwin Street, Perth.

The Royal Agricultural Society's rooms in the Westralian Bank Chambers in William Street, Perth, were used for the Division's General Meetings in November 1920 and May 1921.



Queens Buildings



UWA Irwin Street



Physics Room

Professional Societies' Rooms

In 1922 the headquarters of the Perth Division was shifted to the "Professional Societies' Rooms". This accommodation was a room on the top floor of the No. 2 Electricity Substation at 333 Murray Street, Perth, near Queen Street. At that stage approximately twenty-four years before the formation of the State Electricity Commission, No. 2 Substation was owned and operated by the Electricity and Gas Development of the Perth City Council. The Institution paid a nominal rental for the Professional Societies' Rooms, and shared them with architects, surveyors, and chemical engineers.

Whilst no doubt the Institution was very grateful to be able to use these headquarters, they apparently had many disadvantages. It appears they were cold in winter, hot in summer, and had very hard seats. As well the noise of the tramcars in Murray Street severely disrupted meeting proceedings.

In 1932 a move was made to establish a permanent building to accommodate professional institutions, but the move was deferred because of the Depression.



Professional Societies' Rooms

Turf Club Premises

In 1935 the Perth Division moved its headquarters to the 3rd floor of the Western Australian Turf Club Building on the corner of Howard Street and The Esplanade. The Division occupied these premises until 1938 when it moved into the then recently completed Gledden Building on the corner of William and Hay Streets.



WA Turf Club

Gledden Building

When the erection of Gledden Building was first mooted by the University of WA, a sub-committee of the Perth Division Committee met with the University authorities in an effort to establish appropriate accommodation for the Division in the new building. Agreement was reached and the Gledden Building provided for the Institution's office and meeting room requirements to be provided on the top floor of the new building. The needs of kindred Institutions were provided for as sub-tenants of the Perth Division.

The Division was initially comfortably housed in Gledden Building, but during the twenty years the building was occupied, the membership of the Division grew substantially from approximately 260 to 800.

During the 1950s the limited size of the meeting room and other office accommodation, and the growing parking restrictions and the increasing rents were becoming a problem for both the Division and its sub-tenants.

The organisations who were sub-tenants or hired rooms from the Institution is of interest. They included:

- Royal Australian Chemical Institute
- The Institution Of Surveyors
- Royal Australian Institute Of Architects
- Royal Society Of WA
- Standards Association Of Australia

Institution Of Refrigeration
WA Historical Society
Welding Institute
Public Service Commission – Appeals
Commercial Teachers' Society
Electrical Retailers Association
Pilkington Bros.
Department Of The Interior
AMP Society
The Institution Of Cartographers
Federated Pharmaceutical Guild
Anderson Analysis
Institution Of Automotive & Aeronautical Engineers
Illuminating Engineering Society
Institute Of Marine Engineers
Chartered Institute Of Secretaries
Catholic Lawn Tennis Club
Nor-West Whaling Company
Frigidaire Division – GHM Limited
The Institution Of Radio Engineers
Architects' Board Of WA
Boucher Industries Ltd



Gledden Building

The Purchase Of 10 Hooper Street, West Perth

On 1st March 1955 a letter was received from the Estate Agents, Milner & Co which stated:

"We wish to bring under the notice of your Society a property that we are offering for sale at No. 10 Hooper Street, West Perth, etc".

The property comprised lots 61 and 62 on plan 123, and had a frontage of 80 feet to Hooper Street and a depth of 124 feet. The improvements consisted of:

"a substantially built brick residence with iron roof. The age of the improvements would be approximately 50 years. Accommodation consists of six rooms, kitchen, bathroom, pantry and vestibule, separate sleep-out, garage and workshop. The improvements generally are in a fair state of repair."

The residence was situated on the eastern half of the property. It was advised that the property had recently been put up for public auction, with a reserve price of 7,000 pounds.

An approach was made to the Perth City Council to ascertain the purpose for which the property was classified under the Council's Zoning By-Law. It was advised that Schedule No. 2 applied, which was primarily for residential flats, with subsidiary purposes, inter alia:

Public halls, libraries and museums, concert halls, exhibition rooms and other halls used for the purpose of exposition or exhibition or instruction (other than schools) and places of public assembly not otherwise classified.

This was a most suitable provision for the activities of the Division. The Division Committee gave lengthy consideration to the proposal and it was unanimously decided to make an offer of 6,000 pounds. This offer was accepted by the vendors.

It was the intention of the Division Committee to secure the property and let the house, the rental from which would repay the annual charges on the proposed loan of 3,000 pounds from National Headquarters. It was proposed to remain at Gledden Building so long as the rental charged by the University permitted the Division to sub-let the rooms and adequately cover rent and operating expenses. The current lease then had fourteen months to run, and whether the Division would be able to continue after the expiration of this period depended entirely on a new rental. The Committee believed that this was an opportune time to secure a property suitable for subsequent development as Division premises. The property offered had the advantage of being geographically well placed, suitable for development and being within the Division's capacity to finance without resorting to excessive borrowing. It was the intention to realise on Division funds invested in Commonwealth Stock to the extent of approximately 3,500 pounds.

An approach was immediately made to the Council of the Institution for a loan of 3,000 pounds and this was approved without delay. The purchase of the property was completed in May 1955.

Construction Of Auditorium And Rooms At 10 Hooper Street

In 1956 it became evident that the tenancy at Gledden Building was coming to an end. The rental payable to the University of Western Australia for the 7th floor had increased from 270 pounds per annum in 1951 to a renewal figure of 1,000 pounds per annum in 1957. This in turn caused a loss of kindred societies as sub-tenants, as cheaper rental was found elsewhere. Increasing city traffic and lack of parking facilities were also becoming a problem.

Negotiations were commenced with the Perth City Council for approval to build an Assembly Hall on the vacant block at Hooper Street. Considerable disagreement ensued with the City Building Surveyor over boundary requirements. The Council was insisting on a ten foot setback, which would have negated the entire project if enforced. An appeal to the Minister for Local Government was successful and it was then possible to utilise the block to the boundary line.

Preliminary plans were prepared by the architects, Duncan Stephen and Mercer, for a single storey Assembly Hall on the vacant block, with the house being left substantially intact for the caretaker or other rental purposes. The Institution was required by the Public Health Department to retain full control over the grounds and outbuildings. The estimated cost of the building was 8,500 pounds to 9,000 pounds.

Part of the discussion with National Headquarters in connection with finance concerned the sub-tenants from Gledden Building, and whether they would continue as tenants in new premises.

The approaches made by the Division were considered at the Council Meeting of 25th November 1957 and it was advised that Council was prepared to finance the erection of a building to the extent of 7,000 pounds.

Tenders were called early in 1958 and from nine tenders received, the highest bid was approximately 16,000 pounds and the lowest was just under 10,000 pounds. Details of the tenders were forwarded to National Headquarters, and approval was obtained for the additional loan necessary to accept the lowest tender. Approval was also received to proceed with contract documents for the new building. These documents were eventually forwarded to Headquarters in June 1958 for signature.

The following news item was broadcast on the ABC news service on 18th May 1958.

"The Institution of Engineers has finalised plans for new offices and hall costing ten thousand pounds. Work on the building in Hooper Street, West Perth is scheduled to start soon. The Convenor of the Institution's Building Sub-Committee, Mr Shilbury, says the new premises are expected to be completed early next January. Mr Shilbury said the Institution of Engineers now had five hundred professional engineers in Perth, plus about two hundred student members."

Documentation was completed and sealed on 24th June 1958 and authority was given to the architects to instruct the contractors, Sloan Construction Pty Ltd, to proceed forthwith.

Science House

The next major item for consideration by the Building Sub-Committee was selection of an appropriate name for the new building, and suggestions as follows were submitted.

Telford House
Reveley House
O'Connor House
Thompson House
Lawson House
C.Y. O'Connor
Engaust House
Westerneng House
Technic House or Hall
Royal Engineers Hall
The Engineers House
Westeng Hall
Chartered Engineers Hall
Austeng House

Eventually the Division Committee submitted the following (in order of merit) to National Headquarters:-

1. Science House
2. Science Hall
3. C.Y. O'Connor House

It was considered that Science House was well suited to an establishment such as this, in view of the fact that quite a number of kindred societies in the professional fields would be using the premises as an Assembly Hall and as a professional mailing address. Considerable thought was given to the possible confusion of names with Science House, Sydney, which was the home of National Headquarters, and comment was made on the reluctance to attach a personal name to the premises. National Headquarters advised that it was a matter for the local people to decide but the President and the Secretary indicated personal opinions in favour of "Science House" and that there was merit in having The Institution housed in buildings having the same name in each State. The name was agreed.

The Last Decade

By 1972 the tenants had gradually departed from the house at No. 10 and the building was occupied as office space jointly with The Standards Association of Australia. There were no further property acquisitions after the purchase of No. 12 Hooper Street and during the following years emphasis was placed on refurbishing and adding to the existing buildings as necessary and as funds could be made available.

The first major upgrading was the conversion of the previous office space in the Assembly Hall (which had become a lesser Hall) into a Board Room in November 1973. New carpets and curtains were provided and air conditioning installed. The original Board Room became storage space. The Assembly hall was carpeted in 1974 and insulated and air conditioned in 1975.

During 1975 a major study was again undertaken in connection with the development of the entire property which now comprised the equivalent of three blocks at 10 and 12 Hooper Street. Property developers Milner and Co. prepared a comprehensive

prospectus for total development incorporating considerable space for commercial leasing.

It was eventually agreed that it was not time for this major development and that the existing premises would meet the needs of the Division for a number of years to come.

In 1977 the Standards Association of Australia departed to establish their own office and the extra office space was utilised to provide more working area for The Institution staff and an office for the Secretary. This year also saw alterations to the entrance of the Assembly Hall and a doubling of the size of the servery which services the Hall. In 1978 further air conditioning was installed in the office and as well as the office building was insulated.

In the late 1970's there was available the Assembly Room, Board Room and another Committee Room at the rear of the office building. With the growing membership and increasing number of specialist Branch technical meetings and committee meetings, there was need for at least one further meeting room. There was also need for an acceptable area that could be used for luncheons and suppers. Plans were prepared to build on to the rear of the buildings, to provide:

- 1) An extra meeting room or Function Room.
- 2) Storage space which in turn would release the existing storage room for use as an extra Committee meeting room.

This development, which was completed in November 1980, was financed by funds of \$55,000 provided by National Headquarters. These extensions have made a marked improvement to the facilities available at The Institution premises for technical and committee meetings and functions. The Western Australian Division (as it became in 1969) is now well served in the facilities available for its activities. It is interesting to note that the Division appears to have finally achieved most of what the Committee set out to do in July 1965.

When the Institution building was opened at No. 10 Hooper Street West Perth on 16th February 1959, Hooper Street ran between Thomas Street and Outram Street. In the late 1970's it was realigned to form an extension of Murray Street. With the new address of 712 Murray Street West Perth, the name of Science House was dropped as it was no longer considered appropriate for the Division Headquarters of the national engineering Institution.

Conclusion

In the early planning stages in the late 1950s and in the twenty-four years that the Institution has occupied the present premises, many wise decisions have been made with respect to our headquarters by earlier committees and by the Institution Council. The Institution now owns valuable property, with premises that effectively serve the Perth-based needs of the Division's current members, which number some 3,400.



712 Murray Street, West Perth

Acknowledgments

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